

# THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

February 2025  
Shevat 5785

ד"ר

## SHABBAT TIMES

🕒 Parasha - 🕒 Candle Lighting  
🕒 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)

7 & 8 February – 10 Shevat

🕒 Beshalach  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:28

14 & 15 February – 17 Shevat

🕒 Yitro  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:23

21 & 22 February – 24 Shevat

🕒 Mishpatim  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:17

28 February & 1 March – 1 Adar

🕒 Terumah  
🕒 6:15 – 🕒 7:10

7 & 8 March – 8 Adar

🕒 Tetzaveh  
🕒 6:14 – 🕒 7:03

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

The property right next to my home is a jungle. It is not really. It is a garden, right in the middle of a row of manicured horticultural masterpieces which compete for the annual prize for the nicest verge. The owners have left this property derelict several years ago. With time, weeds started to invade the driveways and lawns. By now the growth is taller than the house and as neighbours we are facing an environmental threat. All the property needs is a couple of bulldozers and a team of gardeners, and it could be restored. Our approaches to the City Council have unfortunately not borne fruit.

Shabbat 10 Shevat (08/02) marks the 75th yartzeit of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak

Schneerson, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe. A few days before his passing, a deep chassidic essay ("Maamar") was prepared for publication on 10 Shevat, ostensibly on the yartzeit of the Rebbe's grandmother who had passed away on that day in 1914. It was based on a verse in Song of Songs (5,1), "I have come to My Garden." The Rebbe expounded on the concept that we must view this world as G-d's garden. Released on what turned out to be the Rebbe's last day in this world, this message would become the legacy and the marching orders of his followers for decades to come. When his successor and son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, formally took over the position of Rebbe, on the first yartzeit, it was by delivering a Maamar expounding on this theme. This practice continued on subsequent yartzeits.

Let us go back 75 years. Neither the Rebbe's personal life nor the state of the world then was a rose garden. He had led the movement from 1920 under communist oppression, repeatedly imprisoned, beaten and tortured by Stalinist forces. Finally, in 1930, he got out of the Soviet Union. Ten years later he managed to escape

the clutches of the Nazis, arriving in New York in the spring of 1940. He was then the leader of a Chassidic movement during WWII and the painful post-war years that followed.

A garden? A jungle would have been more apt. But where everyone saw disaster, the Previous Rebbe saw potential for growth and rebirth. He appointed each of us as his proxy gardeners, to turn this world into a place where Hashem would feel at home and refer to as His garden. His successor created an army of these gardeners, thousands of his emissaries whose mission is to make this world flourish, from New York to Nairobi and from Johannesburg to Jakarta.

I am proud to be carrying the Rebbe's name, a gift from my parents. I am prouder to be one of his gardeners, part of his troops of Shluchim around the world.

A couple of days ago the City of Johannesburg's Department of Environmental Health informed us that the property next door is in an unhygienic condition, poses a health risk and issued a formal notice. Let the bulldozers roll in.

In the meantime, my fellows and I continue gardening, one precious flower after another.

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Chaikin*

## FROM THE REBBETZIN

My colleagues laugh every year on the first day of school when I announce that it is almost December holidays.

This year it really is. We just started school and now it is February already!!

This year I took on an extra load and it is keeping me extra busy.

I am trying to continue being a good wife, (last night I served hotdogs for dinner), a good mom, (haven't chatted with some of my children calmly for a while already), a good rebbetzin (last week I forgot to send out shiur reminders), a good teacher (I came to class with the wrong subject prepared one day), a good friend (I haven't messaged or had coffee dates with anyone in too long).

So I guess I am not the superwoman that I thought I was.

But I do have one big advantage: blessing. I love each of my jobs. At the end of each day I can breathe deeply and thank Hashem for the jobs that I do.

No doubt, as I get into routine, I will improve at all my jobs. I pray only that I continue to love them all.

Have a good month.

*Rivky*

## DVAR TORAH

### 10 Life Lessons from Trees

*By Adam Ross (aish.com)*

#### **Wisdom for living, garnered from the trees and fruits of Israel.**

Jewish wisdom is full of insightful comparisons between the Jewish People and the trees and fruits of Israel, urging us to learn character perfection from our deep-rooted forest friends. So now, with Tu B'Shvat, the New Year for Trees approaching, it's time to put the spring in your step, branch out and take a leaf out of nature's book with these ten green gems.

#### **1. Be diligent, like an almond!**

The almond tree is the symbol of Tu B'Shvat, the first tree to blossom - always right on time. Its essential quality is encapsulated in its Hebrew name, 'shaked', coming from the verb 'lishkod' meaning to be diligent. In Hebrew a 'shakdan' is someone who is always reliable, punctual and diligent.

#### **2. Find the sweetness of life even in the bitter times**

If you've ever visited Israel, you'll notice the date palms are one of the few trees that can flourish anywhere - even on the salty marsh land of the Dead Sea where nothing else grows. In fact Israel

produces a third of its date harvest from the shores of the Dead Sea. And what do these dates produce? Honey! The sweetest thing of all.

King David took inspiration from these amazing trees, writing in Psalms, "A righteous man will flourish like a date palm." Even if you find yourself in the most bitter of places, stand tall, stick to your values and share some sweetness for others to enjoy!

#### **3. A birthday in the middle of winter? New life is just around the corner.**

Just like trees, we all go through our personal winter when productivity feels on the wane. How do we bring ourselves back to life? Trees may now look bare and dead, but don't be deceived; the sap is already rising in the tree trunks and first signs of life are about to appear. We may not see fruit yet, but the inspiration is there. As long as we stay connected, still thirsty for inspiration even through the winter, Tu B'Shvat teaches us that new hope and new life is never far away.

#### **4. Challenging times bring out the best in us.**

When an olive is crushed, it produces oil which lights up the world, reminding us that although we would rather a smooth ride in life, the challenges of life can often bring out the best in us. The Zohar explains that Torah study is

only really absorbed when one makes sacrifices to learn it. No one's looking for tough times, but when they come along, don't lose hope. We never know what light might emerge.

**5. Joy through humility.**

Grapes produce wine which brings us happiness. The grape doesn't mind being trodden on, squeezed to a pulp, filtered, stored and left in a dark barrel to ferment for years. Does any other fruit suffer such treatment? The grape is the king of all fruit precisely for its quality of humility. One day it will turn into wine, soar in price and bring joy to the world. Our rabbis teach us we drink wine on so many occasions in Jewish life to instill this message of humility learned from the grape. When we are prepared to set our egos aside and start to see all of life as a gift, the blessing we have brings joy to our eyes.

**6. Never stop searching for answers.**

The secret to knowledge is to never stop searching. The Talmud learns this from the fig tree which, unlike other fruit trees, ripens little by little over a period of time. The more you search, the more you will find. Torah is a tree of life; as long as we hold on to it and are willing to ask questions, it will always continue to provide us with answers.

**7. Don't judge another Jew.**

We never really know another person fully inside and out, and often we can jump to conclusions. The pomegranate has hundreds of seeds, hidden away in secret chambers and is also likened to the Jewish People, as the Talmud teaches, "What a wonderful nation Israel! Even the most unlikely Jews keep many aspects of tradition, or engage in secret acts of kindness." These are the hidden pomegranate seeds that every Jew possesses.

**8. Take a bite out of that opportunity.**

The apple tree teaches us to sense when a great opportunity is on the horizon and immediately seize it with both hands. King Solomon compared the Jewish People at the Giving of the Torah to an apple tree. "Like as an apple tree blossoms appear before it even produces leaves, so too the Jews at Mount Sinai declared 'We will do,' and then said 'We will understand.'" Opportunities always come with a risk, but sometimes we can spend so long assessing our options that the moment will pass us by.

**9. True beauty is always found within.**

Appearances can often deceive. The Zohar praises the walnut as a fruit that keeps its secrets well hidden. A thick shell, seems at first inedible, however

within it reveals a wonderful source of protein. The Talmud teaches, "That which is precious is always hidden away," hence the Torah not only has a cover, but is also hidden away in the Ark, which also has a cover. In relationships, first impressions can often lead us to the wrong conclusions. The walnut teaches us to protect that which is of most value and understand there is always more to people than meets the eye.

**10. Everything has a purpose**

Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Kook, the first chief rabbi of Israel, was once walking in the fields when a student accompanying him plucked a leaf off a tree. Rav Kook was visibly shaken. Turning to his companion he said, "Believe me when I tell you I never simply pluck a leaf or a blade of grass or any living thing unless I have to." He explained further, "Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song and breathing forth a secret of the divine mystery of the Creation."

*Tu Bishvat (the New Year for Trees) is on 13<sup>th</sup> February*

<b>SERVICE TIMES</b>	
<b>SHACHARIT (A.M.)</b>	
Monday & Thursday)	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:30
<b>MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)</b>	
Friday	5:45

**MAZALTOV**



We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

**BAR MITZVAH**

- Dennis Tannenbaum on his grandson's Bar-Mitzvah in Cape Town on 1<sup>st</sup> February
- Dean & Sara Abro and Ronald & Susan Woolf on their son and grandson's barmitzvah on 8<sup>th</sup> February

**ENGAGEMENTS**

- Justin and Maxine Abratt on the engagement of their granddaughter Ora

Jacobson to Shmuli Heifetz in Israel

**BIRTHDAYS**

- Hayley Gecelter on her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February
- Cecil Kramer on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February
- Mark Meltzer on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February

**BIRTHS**

- Phillip and Rilla Jacobson on the birth of a great granddaughter, born to Akiva and Leah Flax
- Doris Samson on the birth of a great grandson, born to Tzivi and Michael Samson in

Gateshead, United Kingdom

- Phillip and Rilla Jacobson on the birth of a great grandson, born to Mendy and Lauren Sarchi
- Rabbi Yossi and Rivky Chaikin & Mendel and Tzippy Chaikin on the birth of a granddaughter and daughter

**BEREAVEMENTS**

We wish long life to

- Jenny Zaidel and Arlene Zidel on the death of their mother Freda Wolff

May Hashem comfort them and their families among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and grant them long life.



**PURCHASE A LEAF ON OUR  
"SIMCHA TREE"**

***On the occasion of Tu B'Shvat  
(New Year of the Trees, 13/02/20)***

To mark a happy event in your family  
Cost of each leaf is R 540.00 – For details please contact the office